

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Project Location and Description

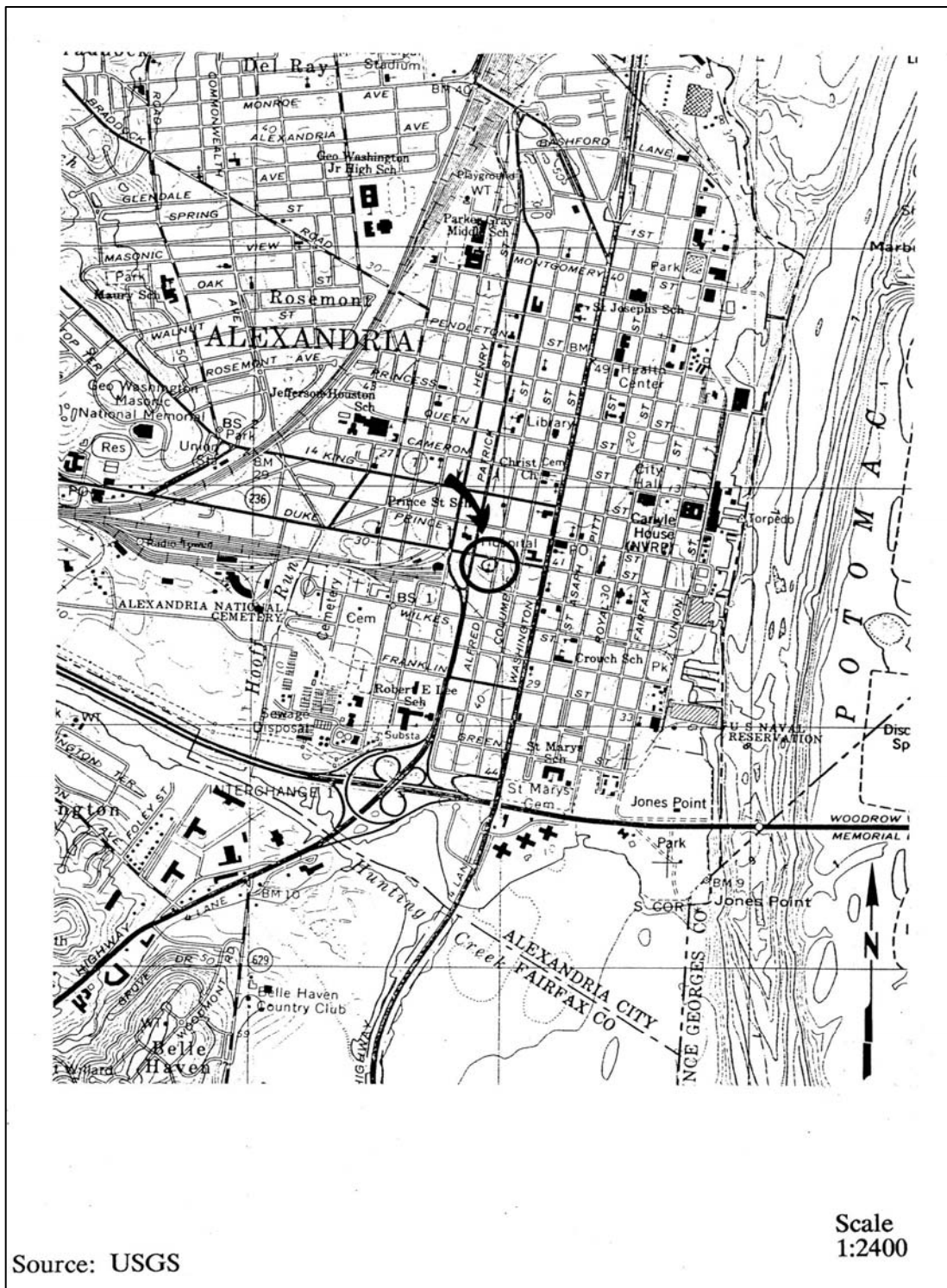
In November 1991, Engineering-Science conducted a Phase I identification study at the Alfred Street Baptist Church in Alexandria, Virginia. In January and February 1992, a Phase II archaeological evaluation study and construction monitoring were conducted. The Alfred Street Baptist Church property is bounded by Duke Street on the north, a housing development to the south, South Alfred Street to the east and South Patrick Street to the west (Figure 1). The November 1991 archaeological identification study was confined to the yard area located to the south and west of the historic church and to the basement of the church. The 1992 archaeological evaluation focused on further excavation in the yard area and the monitoring of construction activities around the foundation and to the north of the historic church and the east of the modern church.

The historic Alfred Street Baptist Church building may be the oldest standing African-American church in Alexandria. The congregation dates from ca. 1803. The first church was probably built on the lot ca. 1818 (Robert J. Nash et al. n.d.). A subsequent church structure was built in the 1850s. There has been some debate as to whether the standing church represents a new structure built in the 1880s or the 1850s structure which was modified in the 1880s.

A preliminary archaeological assessment of the Alfred Street Church property concluded that due to disturbance in the remainder of the lot, the area of highest archaeological potential lay along the Alfred Street frontage (Robert J. Nash et al. n.d.). This study recommended monitoring of construction activities in the area to the east of the modern church extending south to the historic church. Subsurface archaeological testing was recommended in the interior of the historic church and in the grassy area south and west of the historic church (Robert J. Nash et al. n.d.).

The current report discusses the findings of the subsurface archaeological identification study conducted in 1991 in the historic church and in the yard area and the archaeological evaluation study conducted in 1992 in the yard area which included construction monitoring.

The identification study essentially had two goals. The first was to shed light on the architectural history of the church. This was accomplished by excavating test units inside and outside the church to examine the builder's trenches in an attempt to date the building, and to see whether features survived from an earlier structure. As part of this study, an architectural historian examined the church building. Although the evidence is not conclusive, the archaeological investigation supports the argument for a mid-19th-century date for the construction of the main part of the church, with the front 10 feet (the vestibule), and the rear addition (identified in the National Register Nomination as an organ chamber, and reinterpreted as part of the Phase II evaluation study as a chancel) was added at a later date.



Alfred Street
Baptist Church

Figure 1.
Project Location Map

The second goal of the identification study was to conduct an archaeological survey of the yard area immediately to the south and west of the church. The goals of this survey were to:

- a. determine the presence/absence of archaeological resources in the project area from a representative sample;
- b. determine cultural affiliation, site size, site function, and possible significance as could be determined;
- c. assess the project impact on sites; and
- d. determine the need for further work.

The goals of the identification study were addressed through the excavation of a grid of shovel tests at 20-foot intervals on transects 15 feet apart, and the excavation of test units. The test units were placed to intercept the locations of structures shown on historical maps, and to investigate deposits identified during the shovel testing. The survey of the yard identified a brick walkway and an intact 19th-century cultural deposit. Based upon the findings of this study, further archaeological work was recommended.

An archaeological evaluation study was initiated in January of 1992. Construction work on the site was halted in late January because archaeological monitoring was required. During the months of January and February, monitoring occurred around the perimeter of the historic church, where trenches were being excavated to reinforce the foundation. The foundation was drawn and photographed. In addition, a 3 foot x 6 foot test trench (Trench 1) was excavated adjacent to the west wall of the historic church and 50 linear feet of additional trenches were excavated in the yard area to the west of the historic church. A statistically significant sample of the 19th-century stratum was excavated; however, no features associated with this stratum were discovered. Features present on the site post-dated the 19th-century stratum.

Engineering-Science conducted this work in accordance with City of Alexandria Archaeological Standards, May 1990, *Guidelines for Preparing Archaeological Resource Management Reports*, and *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation*. All work was carried out in consultation with and overseen by the staff of Alexandria Archaeology.

B. Environmental Background

The Alfred Street Baptist Church is located in Alexandria, Virginia, on Duke Street between South Patrick and Alfred Streets. The church property forms an "ell", with the main part of the lot, containing the modern church, occupying the entire Duke Street frontage. A small extension along Alfred Street contains the 19th-century church. The entire lot measures approximately 39,500 square feet (.90 acre). The archaeological survey was conducted within the basement of the old church and in the grassy area to the south and west of the old church.

The climate in the vicinity of the project area is characterized as humid, semi-continental, with meteorological systems generally flowing west to east. Seasonal variations exist; summer and fall are generally dominated by tropical air masses originating in the Gulf of Mexico and moving northward, while winter is more frequently dominated by cold, dry air streaming out of central Canada (Mack 1966). The average temperature range is from 48.2 degrees Fahrenheit to 66.3 degrees Fahrenheit. Average annual precipitation is 38.7 inches, of which 17.7 inches fall as snow (Mack 1966).

The project area lies within the Atlantic Coastal Plain physiographic province. The geology of the area is typical of the Coastal Plain, which is characterized by a series of unconsolidated deposits of gravel, sand, silt, and clay ranging in age from the Cretaceous to Recent.

C. Historic Context and Research Questions

The project area is located in the Alexandria Archaeological Resource Area Number 1, known as Old Town. This resource area represents the historic core of Alexandria which was first inhabited by colonists during the late 17th-century. The area was intensively inhabited during the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries and is archaeologically significant. Previous archaeological studies in Archaeological Resource Area Number 1 have indicated that there is high probability for sites which represent all aspects of the city's growth and development.

The project area is located within one of the earliest known free African-American working and middle class neighborhoods, known as "The Bottoms." This neighborhood was located outside of the central commercial and political core of the city. By being thus removed from the dominant white society, the African-Americans in this neighborhood were able to develop their own self-sufficient community. The Alfred Street Baptist Church played an important role in this community by providing a social, educational and economic center. It is also significant for being the oldest standing African-American church in Alexandria and is listed as a Significant Resource in the Alexandria Archaeology Inventory.

Several research questions directed the archaeological and historical studies conducted in preparation for this report.

Researching the history of the Alfred Street Baptist Church and congregation.

Adding to information regarding the occupation of the project area by African-Americans during the nineteenth century.